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Graphic materials such as comic books, graphic novels and manga are an expanding section within most library collections. This study defines graphic materials and examines the role of ratings systems and subjective rating assignment by librarians in the acquisition and collection process. While publishers of such graphic materials provide rating systems for librarians to use when making acquisition and placement decisions, these rating systems are not uniform. This leads to the librarian relying upon professional judgment along with review resources and knowledge of the community served by the library. The author has concluded that librarians self-rate graphic materials consistent with the publisher ratings 50% of the time. Data also shows that a further 30% of the time librarians will rate graphic materials for a younger age than the publishers. Misplacement in the public library, according to the interview information, is a rare occurrence.

#### Headings:

Graphic novels

Age-rating

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Placement

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL RATINGS GAME:  
PUBLISHER RATINGS AND LIBRARIAN SELF-RATING

by  
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Approved by

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Brian Sturm

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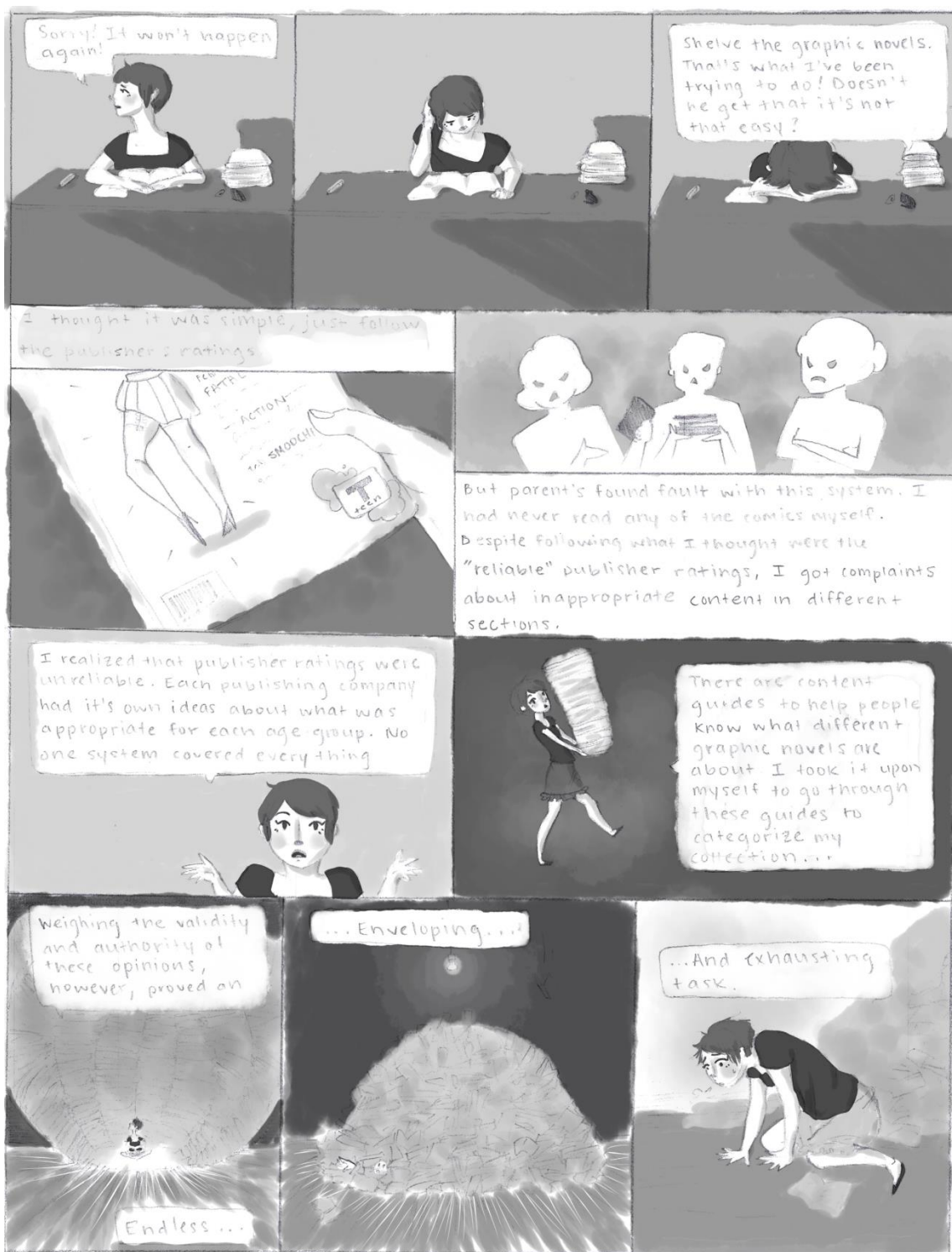
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## Introduction

Graphic novel collections in the public libraries are rapidly growing in size and content area, giving rise to challenges of acquisition, storage, cataloging, and age-appropriate separation among the children, young adult and adult collections (Hogan, 2009). This paper focuses on the first and last points - the challenges of graphic novel acquisition decisions and placement decisions within the collections. Librarians rely upon an inconsistent rating system for acquiring and separating graphic novels in their collections. A panel of writers and creators of graphic novels at the 2009 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, IL addressed this issue in their advice to librarians about collecting graphic materials by asking librarians to recognize the difference between perceived audience and intended audience (Caywood, 2009). A publisher's rating is stamped upon the cover of each graphic novel, manga and comic book title. However, by their very nature, these ratings are inconsistent due to a lack of uniformity in the publishers' rating systems. Publishers created rating systems for their materials only, and the summary of what it takes to earn a given rating is vague at best. While journal reviews and patron preference are powerful tools to counter an inconsistent rating system (proving or disproving the rating), librarians lack the time and resources to individually evaluate every graphic novel title they are considering for acquisition.

Reliance upon the publishers' rating systems can ease the burden somewhat by providing an authoritative source if any of the material is challenged by parents based

upon whether its content is appropriate for the section in which it is shelved. However, the unclear criteria and lack of uniformity among comic book, graphic novel and manga publishers greatly increases the chances of material being misshelved because the content within may be more mature or less mature than the others in its section. A possible way to address this inconsistency is for the nation's public libraries to establish their own age-rating system that focuses on the library's mission to serve its community. Complicating this matter, however, is the American Library Association (ALA) which considers rating systems to be a violation of the Library Bill of Rights. The ALA discourages the incorporation of rating systems in library policy (American Library Association [ALA], 2009). This leaves librarians with little choice but to rely upon the publisher ratings, journal reviews, the librarian's individual evaluations, or some combination of the three. When librarians are left to rely primarily upon the rating systems of various graphic material publishing industries, the author theorized that librarians will self-rate the comic books, graphic novels and manga in their collection, acquisition and placement decisions the majority of the time. In essence, librarians subjectively override the publisher's rating even if they have access to the suggested publisher rating for the graphic materials.

## **Operational Definitions**

The operational definitions contained within this paper were created for the purpose of clarifying certain actions and nouns described in the literature review and methodology. These definitions refer only to the content of this paper.

*Graphic Material(s)* - Comic books, graphic novels and manga in a library setting.

*Age-Rate* - The act of reviewing material content to determine an appropriate age range that will engage the reader.

*Self-Rate* - The act of subjectively categorizing the material for appropriate age using professional judgment instead of relying upon the printed rating or suggestion of ‘authoritative’ sources.

*Self-Rate Down* - What occurs when the professional subjectively categorizes the material for an age older than the published suggestion through the use of content indicators.

*Self-Rate Up* - What occurs when the professional subjectively categorizes the material for an age younger than the published suggestion through the use of content indicators.

*Rating System* - The use of content indicators to determine the age appropriate audience for the material undergoing the rating.

*Content Indicators* - Specific content pieces which inform the rating system (ex. cartoon violence, moderate sexual content, etc.) and are used by professionals to separate materials for appropriate audiences based upon age.

*Graphic Novels* - Compilation of a comic series, bound into a book format, and usually a stand-alone storyline within the comic series centering on a single character or a single event within the comic universe. OR a stand-alone story that has no affiliation with any comic series; it can also be a short series of ‘4-panels’ compiled into one volume.

*Comics/Comic Books* - “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud, 1993). When this term is used it mainly refers to American made or

English language material. The material can cover a vast genre of content but the majority center upon the superhero theme. The graphic style tries to stay relatively realistic instead of cartoonish for the majority of its titles.

*Manga* - Graphic novels of Asian origin (mostly Japanese), these comics are usually a single storyline written in many volumes. The genre is vast but unless indicated otherwise the cultural norms expressed by the characters are Asian. This graphic style is quite distinct from American comics; an example would be the large eye to face ratio.

*Wordless* - In the medium of sequential art/graphic materials, there are titles that do not use words to convey the story. Instead the artwork is focused upon to get the reader through the plot.

## **Literature Review**

There is surprisingly little information available on the use of graphic novel rating systems in public libraries. Graphic novels are an increasingly popular section of the public library and, since these libraries have a larger community with a more diverse age group to provide materials for, it stands to reason that libraries should have some sort of policy in place for acquisition and cataloging of graphic materials. In one researcher's interview with three public librarians about their acquisition and placement policies of graphic materials for their collection each librarian mentioned "reviews in literary and trade journals," and separating the graphic novels into either adult or teen (YA) graphic novel sections. But none of these three mentioned any form of rating systems (Hankins, 2007). However, there is information on the rating systems employed by graphic material publishers, along with cases and opinion pieces of librarians dealing with challenges arising from the use of the publishers' rating systems.

Comic book publishers were once heavily censored by a group called the Comics Code Authority (CCA). This group gave a stamp of approval to the cover of each comic issue that passed their standards for children-safe reading materials (Nyberg, 1998; Petersen, 2011). In recent years the two largest American comic book publishers, Marvel Comics and DC Comics, have broken away from the CCA and created their own age-rating systems. Marvel Comics has taken a leaf out of the American Film Association's book and uses a similar rating system - All Ages, MarvelPG, MarvelPG+, and Parental Advisory: Explicit Content (Rosemann, 2001; Wolk 2007). DC Comics, on the other hand, created a system similar to the one the video gaming industry uses - E, T, T+, and M (Khouri, 2011). To complicate matters even more the manga publishers have developed separate age-rating systems for their graphic materials, although Viz Media has copied the move by DC Comics to mirror the rating system of the video gaming industry (Viz, n.d.). It is not just the letters used in the age-rating systems that differ, however. Some of the content indicators (cartoon violence, partial nudity, foul language, etc.) have shifted between the lines depending upon which publisher is rating the material and this is a problem for librarians who do not have the time to preview every title that is added to their collection. The few opinion pieces by librarians about publisher ratings systems asserted this lack of standardization is a problem (Alverson, 2010; Hogan, 2009).

There is a gap in the literature concerning whether or not librarians should, or do, trust the publisher's age-rating system stamped upon the materials they sell to libraries. One public librarian wrote a short article about how she struggles with the inconsistency of the ratings between the publishing companies, the gradation of content within a series towards more mature audiences, the natural inclination of older children to want to read

beyond their age, and the reaction of adult community members to some materials (Alverson, 2010).

A primary problem that causes librarians anxiety when trying to decide whether to place the graphic material in an area for a different age group than suggested by the publisher is that the publishers themselves do not have a uniform rating system shared between all of them. The top two comic book publishers, Marvel and DC, both have freed themselves from the confines of the Comics Code Authority and have created age-rating systems based upon content that are similar to each other but not the same (Khoury, 2011; Rosemann, 2001). Manga publishers, such as Tokyopop and Viz Media, have done the same thing - creating their own age-rating systems for their materials. Again, their ratings do overlap, but in some areas are not the same (Carlson, 2007; Viz, n.d.). Moreover the manga publisher rating systems are not the same as the comic book publisher ratings. How are librarians supposed to deal with this seemingly arbitrary system of age-rating materials for their intended audiences? How are they to deal with situations where they, or patrons, are shocked by sexual content or images that appear inconsistent with the assigned rating? Reliance upon ratings is even more problematic when the ALA's stance is that implementing a rating system in library policy violates the Library Bill of Rights (ALA, 2009).

One approach to this problem is to ignore it. A review of case studies by Hickerson (2012) suggests this is currently being done. Librarians deal with complaints as they crop up and reference publishers' ratings as a sufficiently authoritative source for why a particular comic book, graphic novel or manga is shelved in the section it is rated for (Hickerson, 2012). A second possibility is to respond to each complaint by moving

the materials to an older or younger section in the library which some libraries do to save time and address the issue of any challenge to the material. During the course of the study, the author was in fact told that this had occurred in at least one instance. A third option is for the librarian to go through each and every title and try to determine, professionally and without personal biases, what materials to acquire and where to place those materials in the collection. The main argument for this third alternative is to trust that librarians know their community and will be able to defend their decision with no need for authoritative backing should someone challenge their choice.

None of these solutions is feasible. To surrender all responsibility and to rely solely upon the publisher ratings is a disservice to librarianship and the community served by the public library. It assumes that placement of materials in the library is not within the purview of the librarian and that the publisher is always correct in their ratings. As some cases attest, the publisher is not always right when it comes to rating which age the content of their material is most suitable (Hickerson, 2012; Wilson, 2009). The creation of the oldest comic censorship committee, the Comics Code Authority, was based upon the idea that Marvel and DC (among other comic book publishing companies) were creating materials unsuitable for children, yet targeting that age group as their primary audience (Wertham, 1953). To be fair, this claim is disputed because, while children did read some material with content considered more mature than they should be reading, it is argued that comic industries did not actually target child audiences but rather teens and adults (Nyberg, 1998).

On the other hand, to use only professional judgment with no authoritative source to assist in affirming the decision to place graphic material in the section of the ‘correct



audience' is not only time-consuming but also bound to invite allegations of subjectivity, inappropriateness, and censorship that cannot be properly defended. And, despite every effort, personal biases would play a varying role if this were the only way to sort graphic materials for appropriate ages (Silverman, 2007). However, there are even some writers/creators of comic books and graphic novels that believe the existence of a publisher rating system should be discontinued altogether (Groth, 2012).

Many of the authoritative sources librarians refer to for graphic materials are review journals and other sources that focus on graphic materials such as *Comic Buyer's Guide*, *Time Magazine's* comic reviews, Graphic Novels in Libraries listserv, YALSA lists, and the "Eisner" and "Harvey" award lists (Hankins, 2007). The reviews can list a variety of helpful information pertaining to what is in the graphic material and the recommended age group for which it is appropriate. This information can and should be believed because it is not just vendors and publishers who put the reviews together but also librarians and people concerned with library collections. But even these resources have their downfalls. Vendors can try to sell materials cited for a certain age group but the librarians may end up with materials that are more suited for an older or younger age group in their community (Alverson, 2010).

The solution proposed by this paper is actually an amalgamation of many factors and solutions to ensure graphic material in the library collection is placed in the area best suited for it and placement occurs without the influence of personal biases or undue censorship. But to confirm the solution's feasibility, an exploratory study took place testing the professional judgment of librarians against that of the publishers. The study consisted of librarian and graduate student volunteers [hereinafter librarians] reading

eight scenes from eight pre-determined graphic material titles and rating them in terms of which age-group is the intended audience. Then, the librarians were interviewed and asked why they rated the way they did.

There were three possible outcomes for this study and each one greatly informed the statement of best practice created by the author. The first outcome is the one this author believed would be the most likely. In this scenario, the librarian will self-rate down the material from the publisher rating. This means that the librarian will assign the material a more mature rating than the publisher did. A possible reason for this outcome is that the library community has a greater young family demographic which would cause the librarian to be cautious when rating materials. Another factor might be the position the librarian holds: are they an adult librarian, a youth librarian, or a children's librarian? Yet another factor might be the personal background of the librarian in terms of age and gender. The study tried to identify these variables and determine whether they played a role in the outcome.

The second outcome was thought to be the least likely in the opinion of the author based upon the case readings cited above (Alverson, 2010; Hickerson, 2012; Wilson, 2009). In this second scenario, the librarian will do the opposite and self-rate up the material from the publisher rating. Instead of considering the material more mature, the librarian will deem the material more suitable for younger ages than the publisher rating. Factors for this outcome might be that the library community is older with more teens or in a community that greatly values graphic materials. The age of the librarian could possibly be a factor for this outcome as well. Older librarians may not have had much personal exposure to graphic materials and may be more likely to rate down, whereas

younger librarians may rate up because they remember having read graphic material when they were younger, and younger librarians may not react strongly to the images and text that is unique to graphic materials.

The third outcome straddled the line between self-rating down and self-rating up. In this final scenario, the librarians will actually age-rate the graphic materials the same as the publishers. This outcome was considered to be the second most likely to happen because while the publishers may not have a specific community to adjust their ratings to, they are professionals who are aware of the content of their graphic material and the intended audience for that material (“To rate”, 2006).

Despite the lack of scholarly literature on this subject matter, the case studies and opinions describe an area of research that the public libraries have yet to address. The design of the study, therefore, pulled together issues, like those mentioned above, that the author considered influential to the participants and thus, their ratings. The analysis of the data gathered from this study provides a guideline for librarians to follow when placing graphic material in their library collection.

## **Methods**

### **Purpose**

The major sources of data used in this study were drawn from exercises and interviews with librarians and library students. During the exercise/interview, the author presented a rating system based upon the possible four main graphic novel sections in the public library setting (All Ages, Teen, Teen +, and Mature) and had the study participants use the system to age-rate eight sequences (scenes) from eight graphic material titles chosen by the author. Each sequence chosen had clear but not obvious content indicators

(“not obvious” meaning that there is less than overt violence, language or sex in the chosen scenes which are the key indicators the publishers base their criteria on). From this interview, the author expected to be able to determine which age-rating process librarians typically use and make recommendations for best practice.

### **Design of Study**

Because the author has established a limit with the four possible ages (see Appendix H for rating system used in the exercise) for the librarians to choose from during the exercise, the selection of the graphic novels also became limited. The author decided that the selection of material, which represents all of the possible ratings included in the exercise, would be divided into groups of two and fall into a specific age-rating category. For example, scene eight, *Charm School* (see Appendix F for the exercise scene from *Charm School*), is intended for an older teen audience so it is rated T+. And so is scene three, *Mutant, Texas* (Dini, 2003). To avoid clichéd decisions on obvious scenes of violence or sex and to keep the decisions pertinent to thoughts of the communities the public libraries are situated in, the author chose the titles and subsequent scenes with a few criteria in mind.

Firstly, the graphic novels chosen should not be on any current “Best of” lists. This eliminates some recognition and automatic placement based upon past experience with the title in question. Secondly, the scenes chosen should be taken from the beginning or very close to the beginning of the story chapter. By choosing earlier scenes the author emulates the browsing reader who makes snap decisions about further reading titles by reading the beginning scenes. Graphic novels, however, present a unique characteristic to this exercise limitation. They can be opened to any page and their visual aspect tends to

make the storyline intriguing/obvious. The public library holds a few visible media products (such as videos, video games, and computer games) so they are aware that seeing a love scene in a film is slightly different than reading a love scene in a novel. Graphic material falls in-between these two worlds because it is both literary and visual, and this creates the potential for greater risk of misplacement of and challenges to the material if the nature of the medium is not recognized by the library. Among the librarians interviewed there were a few who fulfilled the role of cataloger. In this role they choose where in their library a title best fits with help from resources and aids. When it comes to graphic material, however, one exercise participant admitted to making a habit of flipping through the title to consciously look for content indicators to assist the reviews and publisher suggested age-ratings and to avoid misplacement. Thirdly, the graphic novel titles chosen for the exercise must have non-obvious content indicators. By non-obvious the author refers to the listed content indicators from major comic book and manga publishers (ICv2, 2007; Ratings, 2012; Rosemann, 2001; Viz, n.d.). Many of these content indicators are concerned with the levels of violence, language and sex contained within a singular title. This author chose the material for the exercise based upon other indicators that are not those listed by major publishers but fall under those indicators as subheadings that also suggest a certain audience. An example of publisher-focused content indicators is seen in scene one (Baker, 2008) where a character turns the slaver's own weapon on his posse and then later attempts suicide to avoid capture. The violence is apparent and maintains a presence throughout the graphic novel as it is considered a main part of the plot. However, it is due to the severity of violence depicted in this graphic novel that scene one is age-rated M (18 and over) according to the criteria listed by major

publishers. An example of content indicators that are not addressed as clearly by the publisher ratings can be seen in scene 8 (Appendix F). *Charm School* by Elizabeth Watasin (Watasin, 2002) does not have any violence above cartoon-level. Comedic punches happening off-screen or accompanied by a sound effect among high school teenagers, a chase by police yelling out “Break it up kids!” through a cemetery where a party was held; this is the extent of the violence taking place in this title. The romance, however, is the main focus. But romance is not to be mistaken for sexual scenes. Like most high school romance titles there is kissing and dressing up for parties but no sex scenes. There is, however, a twist to the romance. The main character is a teenage girl attracted to other girls. Homosexual romance coupled with words like “A CROSS-dressing vampire with a WITCH?!” “A cross-dressing DYKE vampire with a ..” (see Appendix F) is not addressed in publisher ratings but this graphic novel title is rated T+ (16 and older) because this group is the intended audience.

These are among the criteria that guided the author when choosing graphic novel titles for the exercise. Other themes such as divorce, death, nuclear mutations, and leaving home/saying goodbye are emphasized in the chosen scenes to reveal the sometimes inadequate criteria used by major publishers’ rating systems.

The following is the list of graphic novel titles used in the exercise, publisher assigned ratings, and the content indicators (both publisher and author given) present within:

## Scene 1:

“Nat Turner” by Kyle Baker.

Rated M.

Content Indicators: slavery, violent capture and defense, death, attempted suicide.

## Scene 2:

“Flight” v.3 : an anthology of short stories. “Snow Cap” by Matthew S. Armstrong.

Rated E.

Content Indicators: cartoon violence

## Scene 3:

“Mutant, Texas: Tales of Sheriff Ida Red” by Paul Dini and J. Bone.

Rated T+.

Content Indicators: death, mild violence, nuclear mutation, vernacular, guns, skimpy outfit

## Scene 4:

“Amelia Rules! : What Makes You Happy” by Jimmy Gownley.

Rated E.

Content Indicators: cartoon mischief, leaving home/saying goodbye, divorce

## Scene 5:

“Castle Waiting” v.1 by Linda Medley.

Rated T.

Content Indicators: suggested abuse, leaving home, journey to safety

## Scene 6:

“Death Jr.” by Gary Whitta and Ted Naifeh.

Rated T.

Content Indicators: bullying, death, manifestation of Death, literary allusions (Pandora and her box, etc.)

## Scene 7:

“The Goon: Rough Stuff” by Eric Powell.

Rated M.

Content Indicators: severe violence, foul language, drinking/reference to drunkenness, zombies

## Scene 8:

“Charm School: Magical Witch Girl Bunny” by Elizabeth Watasin.

Rated T+.

Content Indicators: high school romance, witches/vampires/faerie, homosexual relationship, dating



### **Solicitation of Participants/Geographical Location**

In an effort to move beyond the immediate area and speak to public librarians from geographically different locations, the author chose four states to visit (North Carolina, Virginia, Nevada, and South Dakota). Within those states certain public library systems were chosen to be contacted based upon the presence of a graphic novel collection and to gain a sampling from public libraries on the East Coast, in the West and in the Midwest. In order to contact the public library systems, the author gained approval from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Internal Review Board (IRB) to engage human subjects in the study and created a consent form that each participant must sign in order to be part of the study (see Appendix B for consent form). Then the author conducted an online search, used google.com to search for the names of the library systems, found the contact information of seven system directors and contacted them. The directors were contacted via email first to gain permission/approval to visit and to speak to their librarians (see Appendix D for initial systems directors' email). Attached to the email sent to the directors was the recruitment letter for the individual librarians that the author hoped to contact (see Appendix E for recruitment letter). Of the library systems contacted, a total of six public library systems agreed to participate in this study, volunteering fifteen participants. There were no limitations on participants other than they must currently be working in a public library. It had already been determined that the participants' respective libraries had a graphic novel collection.

Another group of participants contacted for the study were current graduate library students in the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-Chapel Hill. By including these participants in the study, the author hoped to discern whether being a

student would affect how participants age-rated materials. The recruitment email for the students (see Appendix C) was sent through a listserv hosted by the library school for its master students. A total of nine library students participated in the study. Combined with the fifteen public librarian volunteers, this brought the total number of participants for the study to twenty-four.

The participants were generally supportive of the research. During the course of the exercise and interview they frequently commented that they were intrigued to be asked about their graphic novel collection. Apparently, while popular in the libraries, graphic materials are not generally known to produce much scholarly interest. As the author was informed, much of the graphic collection is filled through either review lists or by librarians who are fans of the medium. Because the author possesses an extensive personal knowledge of graphic materials, having read graphic novels, comic books and manga since she was a young child, a few participants even asked for advice concerning their own collection and how they might make it better. The author's status as a graduate student in Library Science with several years of work experience in libraries enhanced the interview process and because she can identify with their experiences, librarians were generally candid and she was able to collect qualitative data that reflected accurately the participants' perspectives.

### **Scene Ratings**

The following chart provides a summary of the ratings assigned by the participants to the eight scenes in the exercise. The ratings were then categorized as falling within one of the three possible outcomes - self-rate down, publisher rating and self-rate up.

<b>PUBLISHER'S RATINGS</b>	<b>Below (self-rate UP)</b>	<b>In-line (publisher rating)</b>	<b>Above (self-rate DOWN)</b>
<b><i>Scene 1</i></b> (M - 18 and older)	18	6	0
<b><i>Scene 2</i></b> (E - All Ages)	0	23	1
<b><i>Scene 3</i></b> (T+ - 16 and older)	21	3	0
<b><i>Scene 4</i></b> (E - All Ages)	0	21	3
<b><i>Scene 5</i></b> (T - 12 and older)	7	14	3
<b><i>Scene 6</i></b> (T - 12 and older)	2	19	3
<b><i>Scene 7</i></b> (M - 18 and older)	15	9	0
<b><i>Scene 8</i></b> (T+ - 16 and older)	6	15	3
<b>TOTAL (n=192)</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>AVERAGE</b> (percentage of total)	<b>36%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>

To compute the average number of responses that fell within the three possible outcomes, the author multiplied the number of scenes by the number of participants. This gave the total number of ratings the exercise had produced. If this total number of ratings is divided by the number of times a participant self-rated down, in-line or self-rated up the suggested publisher rating, an average percent (bottom row of the chart) can be determined to show approximately how the participants tended to rate during the entire exercise. Having said this one must be cautious in attempting to draw any general conclusions from this type of averaging. For example, the ratings 'E' and 'M' will only allow a rating in-line or above for the first and in-line or below for the second scenes. To see graph representations of how participants rated each scene see Appendix G.

### **Rating Exercise/Interview**

In this study, the author gave the librarian participants complete scenes (meaning an understandable glimpse of the main plot with clear content indicators) from the eight graphic novel/comic titles. The participants were then asked to rate the materials based upon their subjective opinion with assistance from a rating guide for cut-off ages (see Appendix H). For the purposes of this study, manga was not included as part of the graphic materials exercise as it is culturally different from American graphic novels/comics. The participants were never advised of the content rating that had already been assigned by the publisher. This precaution was taken to isolate professional opinion from the influence of outside resources to better compare the age-rating differences between librarians and publishers. In fact, several participants asked if they could verify the publisher's rating prior to offering an opinion. By requiring everyone to rely upon their training and experience, the author controlled for the influence of pre-assigned ratings. This also forced the librarians to focus on their individual communities and individual experience as highly influential factors.

The author provided both the scenes and the chosen rating system from a major graphic novel/comic book publisher. DC's rating system was chosen and adapted based upon the clarity of its definitions per unit of measurement concerning which content indicators separated each age. With that guide, all the participants can mentally arrange their library by intended audience and the author has a consistent age-rating system to refer to. The author fully expected the librarians to produce evidence supporting outcome one, to self-rate down from the publisher's rating, despite not knowing the suggested rating.

Once the exercise was completed and the participant had reviewed all eight graphic novel scenes and age-rated them, the author then conducted an interview with the participant. During the interview the author explored the basis for the participant's decision-making while focusing on what influences (external or internal) factored into the final rating choice (see Appendix A for interview questions). Part of the purpose of the interview portion was to reveal what content indicators may be more influential to librarians than others. By attempting to isolate those influences, the author hoped to use them to identify the subjective considerations of the librarians. The data from the interview coupled with information from the exercise identified the type of age-rating done by the librarians (Outcome 1 or 2 or 3). The author used all the information to ultimately formulate a solid guideline for librarians to follow when placing graphic material in their library collection so that time would be saved and the material would be placed among the appropriate age group sections.

The interview was broken into two parts. Part one focused on the librarian, their library collection of graphic materials and the community their library serves. The function of this segment was to establish a background of information and knowledge of the librarian and his/her library in an attempt to find relationships between them and their age-rate decisions during the exercise. Part two was concentrated entirely upon the exercise the subject just completed. The questions were about the participant's thoughts and analysis of the scenes they were asked to age-rate. The data gathered from this section of the interview provided the basis for the bulk of the author's analysis as it offered the greatest insight into the librarians' challenges of acquisition and placement of the graphic materials in their libraries.

## Analysis

The analysis of the data (rating exercise and interview) is a qualitative analysis. This paper is attempting to understand the relationship between ratings assigned by librarians and those assigned by publishers. Also of interest was the impact the librarian's assigned ratings would have on the placement of graphic materials in the library. This necessitated a closer look at the variables shaping the age-rating decisions. Those variables included: the creation of a rating system, the content indicators within the graphic materials, and information about the librarians in contact with those materials. The author is attempting to provide an overall explanation of the relationship in order to establish a statement of best practice that is flexible enough to be tailored to many public library communities.

The author started by choosing a rating system from a well-known comic book publisher. The choice was between DC and Marvel Comics who both had revamped their comics with suggested age-ratings based upon certain content indicators. Of the two, DC had a more comprehensive summary of which content indicators were guiding their suggested audience. Consequently, the author chose to utilize DC's age-rating system.

During the first superficial analysis of the data, it became apparent outcome one, which stated participants will self-rate down the graphic material to an older audience than suggested by publishers, was not supported by this evidence. The majority of participants supported outcome three to the greatest degree. On an interesting note, a larger percentage of participants also generously self-rated up the materials to a younger audience rather than self-rated down indicating that outcome two was supported by this evidence as well. One possible reason for this was uncovered during the interview where

participants voluntarily mentioned that their thoughts, when age-rating the materials, focused on their library constituents. More specifically, they concentrated on the most suitable audience for each scene. Much of the second part of the interview (the content analysis by the participants) revealed that factors within the graphic materials selection were subjectively shaped by predetermined/career-established standards for certain audiences. For example, a major factor in age-rating for children (the 'E' unit) centered on the age of the characters. If the main characters of the scene were seen as children, it was highly likely that the participant would age-rate the material for children or preteen ('E' or 'T' unit).

Another predictor impacting the rating decisions was reading level. The participants did not mistake the wordless scenes as always appropriate for children. Instead, participants consistently mentioned the content of the text and the verbosity of the characters as opposed to the images. In some cases, large amounts of text seemed to cause a downward shift in age-rate by the participants with the stipulation that children and preteens do not generally seek out very wordy graphic materials. As for the wordless scenes, one scene was labeled mature by the publisher (scene one) while another scene was suggested for all ages by its publisher (scene two). During the interview, participants revealed that when the wordless scenes were presented, the artwork, the age of the protagonist and plot figured prominently in ascertaining the appropriate age-rating. Generally, the participants tended to self-rate up the scenes without text. Interview comments revealed that while participants were aware that wordless scenes did not denote a child-appropriate rating, there was still a tendency to make the materials available to a broader audience.



The interviews revealed another predictor the participants relied upon in age-rating the materials. They tended to view the nature of the artwork as a predictor of the constituents' interest level in the graphic materials. Highly detailed artwork depicted in darker colors or black and white suggested to the participants that the intended audience was older. Many participants pointed out in their scrutiny of their decisions that bright colors and rounded/softer drawn figures denoted a younger audience. Participants connected the art style of picture books and the sheer attraction to bright colors many children have to a younger, less mature audience.

Violence, language and sex were three content indicators that made an impact on almost all participants when age-rating and, coincidentally were the main concerns of publishers. The more graphic any of these indicators became, the older the age of the suggested audience. This correlation held true to the extent that when participants came upon images that blatantly showed or alluded to one or any of these indicators, the majority of participants noted them as a reason for an older age-rating. The only noticeable hesitation and subsequent division between how participants linked rating units occurred when participants came upon historical content such as in scene one (Baker, 2008) and when child characters were placed in plots that contained heavy themes such as death as depicted in scene six (Whitta, 2005). Ratings among participants in these cases varied the most, signifying that there seemed to be a clash of content indicators.

Beyond the discussion of the participants' thoughts on their rating decisions, the participants themselves were asked questions about their age, position in the library, the library's graphic materials collection, and how they perceive their community. To the

surprise of the author, age made such a minor contribution to the relationship between participants and age-rating graphic material that there is no indication it influenced the decisions made during the ratings exercise. Gender, on the other hand, had a much more noteworthy impact upon the data. Male participants tended to be more lenient (self-rating up to a younger age audience) in their rating decisions than the female participants.

Conclusive data analysis for this paper shows that, of the author's three possible suggested outcomes, outcome one (age-rate down) was not supported by the evidence, while outcomes two (self-rate up from the publisher's rating) and three (rate in-line with publisher rating) were supported by the evidence.

### **Participation Overview**

Of the seven library systems contacted in five states, six responded and agreed to participate in the study. Within the six library systems fifteen librarians took part in the study exercise and interview. Among the graduate students who were contacted through a listserv, nine responded and participated as well. The job descriptions of these librarians ranged from cataloger to head of youth services to reference librarian with an even distribution between the numbers of librarians who classified themselves as adult, teen, or child librarian. Geographically, the author purposefully chose states located along the East Coast, in the Midwest, and the West to see if geography was a factor that would affect the hypotheses of this study. Evidence reveals that geographic location was not a noteworthy influence upon the participants or their age-rating decisions.

The author was not concerned with the size of the library collections just as long as the libraries participating in the study had a graphic novel collection. The focus of the study was not upon what titles or how many graphic materials were included in a

library's collection. Circulation statistics of those items were also not a part of the study. Therefore, the size and content of the graphic novel collection in a library was not considered when the library system was chosen for participation.

Briefly, the author asked the participant about how they perceived the community served by their library (see Appendix A). In their responses, the majority of participants used terms such as “diverse”, “young family”, “educated”, and “active”. Other terms to specify the population also centered upon concepts such as movement of the people, development of the community, educational systems, and the economic status of people within the community.

## **Limitations**

As with most studies that identify a gap in knowledge and attempt to begin bridging that gap, this paper has limitations that narrow the study to specific points while simultaneously offering suggestions for future research on the topic. The limitations start with decisions the author made when creating the exercise and interview. Due to the lack of substantial scholarly work on the relationship between librarians and publisher ratings concerning graphic materials, the author selected certain variables gleaned from the writings and incorporated them in the study.

### **Weakness of Data**

The data gathered on this subject was subjective which varies from person to person. Furthermore, there were only cases of anecdotal evidence and opinion pieces describing certain reactions to placement of graphic material in a public library collection. Since an interview was part of the study, there was some concern about the validity of the answers provided as the author was the one conducting the interview. In

effect, there was a danger of subjective interpretation of interviewee responses. There was also the possibility that interviewees apprehended the underlying purpose of the exercise and provided answers that cast the interviewee in a favorable light or answers they perceived the interviewer as desiring. Another weakness of the data was that the material being tested was restricted to eight titles of American graphic novels, and only represented an extremely small portion of a public library's graphic materials collection.

## **Results/Significance of the Work**

The author established that there were three possible outcomes for this study. The first, and thought to be the most likely by the author, was that librarians will self-rate down the graphic material in their library from the suggested publisher rating. This means that if the publisher suggests a title is age-rated 'T' (12 and older) then the librarians, rating this title without prior knowledge of the publisher rating, should rate it 'T+' (16 and older). The second outcome, thought to be the least likely by the author, is that librarians will self-rate up the graphic material. This means that when age-rating graphic materials, librarians will give titles a rating for a younger audience than that suggested by the publishers. In essence, if the publishers suggest a 'T' (12 and older) rating on a title the librarian will rate that title 'E' (all ages). The third and final outcome addressed by this study was one in which the librarians will age-rate graphic materials the same as the suggested publisher rating. So, if the publisher age-rates a title as 'M' (18 and older) the librarian will also age-rate that title as 'M' (18 and older). After analyzing the data gathered from the rating exercise and interview portion of the study, evidence was found to support both outcomes two and three.

The significance of this work is that it attempts to fill a gap in knowledge about a process of librarianship. Librarians should feel confident about the placement of materials in their collection and this study focuses on a particularly new collection to the public library that is notoriously difficult to place in the appropriately aged section of the library. By exploring the relationship between publishers and librarians in terms of age-rating graphic materials, this author has gathered enough data to give a statement of best practice that will be available for all public libraries to utilize.

### **Statement of Best Practice**

Based upon the data gathered from the age-rating exercise of eight graphic novel scenes and interviews with the participants about internal and external factors that may or may not have influenced their rating decisions, the author has found evidence to support two outcomes about how librarians will rate and subsequently place graphic materials in their library collection. The majority of the time, librarians will agree with the publisher ratings; however, there is also a great chance that librarians will also self-rate up (to a younger audience) some graphic materials. In light of this evidence, the best practice for public librarians would be to follow the publisher ratings whenever possible, and when the title in hand has not been rated by its publisher, librarians should rely upon their professional judgment because, in doing so, they will satisfactorily place the material in an age-appropriate area the majority of the time. This author believes that reliance upon the publishers' rating systems coupled with a professional librarian's opinion, separated from personal bias and based upon their current collection content and policy for separation of materials in the collection, is best practice.

### **Who will Directly Benefit?**

The focus of this study is upon the public library system, which will benefit the most since it was the subject of study. However, school library media centers also benefit from the findings of this experiment. Graphic novel collections within the libraries are a growing section that is relatively new to libraries and, therefore, some librarians are unsure how to handle placement of the materials. By narrowing down the effect of the publishers' rating systems upon librarians it has been determined that librarians' professional judgment of graphic material content is in-line with publisher ratings the majority of the time. The direct benefits of the creation of this statement is to, essentially, save time for librarians and instill confidence in the professional to trust their own judgment when acquiring and placing materials in this new collection area of the public library. There is also a direct benefit to publishers since the evidentially supported outcomes indicate that publishers and librarians are in agreement on age-appropriate audiences the majority of the time.

### **Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study was to compare librarians' self-rating of graphic materials with publishers' prescribed rating schemes with the eventual goal of crafting a best practice statement for public librarians. One goal of the study is to establish a best practice for public librarians concerning the placement of graphic materials in their collection. Of the three possible outcomes established by the author only two were supported by the data gathered from the rating exercise and following interview of twenty-four participants. The first supported outcome states that librarians are more likely to rate graphic materials the same as the publishers. A possible reason for this is that the

same content indicators that influence the publishers' decisions on ratings equally affect the decisions made by librarians when placing graphic materials. Professional judgment seems to be displayed by both parties which are in turn influenced by their communities. The second supported outcome revealed that librarians, should they not rate the materials in-line with the publisher suggested rating, will self-rate up the material to a younger audience. Comments made during the interview revealed that reasons for this vacillate between educational content and the idea that people mature at different rates. However, the librarians were not incautious when deciding that the material could be placed for a younger audience to access. Many librarians mentioned the fact that their library policy clearly states that parents are responsible for monitoring their children's reading choices. The third outcome proposed, but not evidentially supported, stated that librarians would self-rate down materials to an older audience the majority of the time. In light of the results of this study, the author's statement of best practice encourages reliance by the librarians upon the publisher ratings and their own professional judgment concerning what their community is able to handle. This conclusion derived through data analysis benefits not only public libraries but school media centers and graphic material publishers as well. The impact of the study centers on the understanding of professional librarians and publishers as to the relationship the rating systems have with the library collecting these materials.

## **Further Study**

There are numerous avenues of further study concerning this topic. Graphic materials in the public library setting are still relatively new and have yet to be sufficiently researched. One topic that could stem directly from this study would focus on



gender differences when rating graphic materials. Out of twenty-four participants in this study only three were male and they were more inclined to self-rate up than the females. There was also an interesting difference in how the males interviewed versus the female participants. For example, when the author asked what pictures or dialog in the scenes influenced their rating decisions the males tended to focus more on the pictures than dialog and spoke more about what they saw than read. Further study might reveal that males focus on a different part of the graphic material when rating than females as was hinted at in the interview process.

Within this study there are a few places of control that could be altered to possibly affect results. Instead of interviewing public librarians indiscriminant of their position in the library, a researcher could focus on those that work specifically with a graphic novel collection and those that do not work directly with it to ascertain if there is any difference in rating answers. Or, a researcher could divide participants up based upon the size of the population they serve. Would a smaller population cause a librarian to be more discerning about which graphic materials become part of the collection and would their subsequent rating differ from that of a librarian with a larger population to serve? Would it be helpful to have a study that focuses only on graphic materials (rated mature by the publishers) that provoke the greatest amount of anxiety and are of greatest concern to librarians and adults? These are just a few of the questions prompted by this exploration of graphic material ratings. The author encourages future researchers to focus on this rapidly growing area of public library collections.

## Bibliography

About cbldf. (2012). In *Comic book legal defense fund*. Retrieved from <http://cbldf.org/about-2/>

This is an information page about a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the First Amendment rights of the comics medium.

ALA. (2009, July 15). Labeling and rating systems: An interpretation of the library bill of rights. In *ALA : American library association*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/labelingrating>

This short document clearly delineates the ALA's stance on the use of rating systems in library policy. They hold that the Library Bill of Rights is violated when adoption, enforcement, or endorsement of a rating system becomes part of the library policy.

Alverson, B. (2010). The pitfalls of age ratings. In *Graphic novel reporter*. Retrieved from <http://graphicnovelreporter.com/content/pitfalls-age-ratings-op-ed>

This short opinion article points out the shortcomings of relying upon predetermined age ratings from publishers in a library. The main areas of contention arise from inconsistency in the publishers' ratings, community standards, children versus teenage audience, and the progression of some series towards more adult content.

Baker, K. (2008). *Nat Turner*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams.

Scene 1 graphic novel title. Rated M.

Carlson, J. D. (2007, February 20). Tokyopop revising rating system. In *Manga worth reading*. Retrieved from <http://comicsworthreading.com/2007/02/20/tokyopop-revising-rating-system/>

This is an opinion piece on a major manga publisher's change in their printed rating system. Carlson considers a rating system a good idea to inform parties of the possible content. The author mentions the fact that other publishers use their own systems and questions whether the non-uniformity is due to competition.

Caywood, Carolyn. "My those novels certainly are graphic!" *IFRT report* 72 (2009): 6-7. Web. <http://www.ala.org/ifrt/sites/ala.org/ifrt/files/content/ifrtreport/IFRT72.pdf>.

This is a short article summarizing a panel discussion at the 2009 ALA Annual Conference that featured three popular comic creators. The panelists encouraged librarians to recognize the differences between the intended audiences for some graphic novels.

Ratings. (2012). In *DC comics*. Retrieved February 6, 2013, from <http://www.dccomics.com/ratings>

The webpage of DC Comics' official site that lists the ratings used by the publisher for their products.

Dini, P., & Bone, J. (2003). *Mutant, Texas: Tales of sheriff Ida Red*. Portland, OR: Oni Press. Scene 3 graphic novel title. Rated T+.

Gaiman, N., Moore, T., Thompson, C., & Brownstein, C. (Panelists). (2009). *My those novels certainly are graphic!* [Online video]. ALA, AAP, CBLDF. Retrieved from <http://blip.tv/alaoif/my-those-novels-certainly-are-graphic-2531147>

This is the video of the 2009 ALA Annual Conference panel featuring three comic creators who discuss censorship of their works and others in the library.

Gownley, J. (2002). *Amelia rules!: What makes you happy*. New York, NY: ibooks. Scene 4 graphic novel title. Rated E.

Groth, G. (2012, June 13). The Alan Moore interview. *The comics journal*, 60-73. Retrieved from <http://www.tcj.com/the-alan-moore-interview-118/>

Comic creator Alan Moore is interviewed about his opinion on the 1987 debate about Marvel and DC Comics creating a rating system. He expresses disapproval over the existence of any rating system for comics.

Hankins, L. (2007, May 2). Graphic novels in public libraries. Retrieved from [http://www.lrs.org/documents/field\\_stats/graphic\\_novels.pdf](http://www.lrs.org/documents/field_stats/graphic_novels.pdf)

This is a short field study of three public libraries and the development of their graphic novel collections. The main points center on their policies regarding collection of graphic novel materials. They all mention the use of authoritative resources when engaging in the selection process. It is assumed that the authoritative resources will also mention the age group that the material is appropriate for.

Hickerson, M. (2012, June 14). Library pulls graphic novels. In *Slice of SciFi*. Retrieved from <http://www.sliceofscifi.com/2012/06/14/library-pulls-graphic-novels/>

This is a very short article reporting an incident of a parent urging the public library to pull Alan Moore's "Neonomicon" from the shelves. Her daughter (14 and according to policy can check out anything in the library) had brought it home. The library's response is that parents are responsible for what their children read.

Hogan, J. (2009). Graphic novels in today's libraries. In *Graphic novel reporter*. Retrieved from <http://graphicnovelreporter.com/content/graphic-novels-todays-libraries-roundtable>

This is a short interview of four librarians where questions about graphic novels in their respective libraries are asked. The librarians discuss how their libraries separate graphic novels in their library. They talk about how they separate the materials (either physically or with the use of a letter indicator for age group) and how graphic novels have been received by the community. There is also a question devoted to the librarians' reaction to publisher age ratings.

ICv2. (2007, February 21). Tokyopop details rating criteria: For new system. In *ICv2*. Retrieved from <http://www.icv2.com/articles/news/10114.html>

Manga publishing company, Tokyopop, has created a new age rating system for its materials and this short article is a list of 'content indicators' that form the basis for its age ratings.

Khouri, A. (2011, January 20). DC ditches comic code authority, installs new rating system. In *Comics Alliance*. Retrieved from <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/01/20/dc-ditches-comics-code-authority-installs-new-ratings-system/>

A short report about how DC Comics decided it would no longer use the Comic Code Authority seal of approval. DC Comics will be implementing their own rating system for their materials, mimicking the self-rating the video game industry uses. This article breaks down the new system slightly to include content indicators and then goes on to outline the CCA rules that are being rejected.

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York, NY: Kitchen Sink Press.

A comprehensive guide to the inner workings of comic books and their place in the world of entertainment, art, and literature.

Medley, L. (2002). *Castle waiting* (Vol. 1). Portland, OR: Olio Press.

Scene 5 graphic novel title. Rated T.

Nyberg, A. K. (1998). *Seal of approval: The history of the comics code*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Nyberg's history of the Comics Code Authority is a necessary work when considering the use of any rating system upon comics and graphic novels because it reveals some of the causes that eventually led to the censorship of comics and how far the CCA took its job. The most informational part of this work is that it approaches the topic from the side of the industry and the public that fuels it. This is important because it examines the effect the public has had upon the comics industry today.

Petersen, R. S. (2011). *Comics, manga, and graphic novels: A history of graphic narratives* (pp. 153-226). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

A short history of the beginning of the Comics Code Authority, a rating system established post-WWII to regulate content and censorship within comic books. This section also mentions how independent comics would not adhere to the code and found other avenues of sale.

- Powell, E. (2004). *The goon: Rough stuff*. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics.  
Scene 7 graphic novel title. Rated M.
- Rosemann, B. (2001, July 5). Marvel's new ratings system explained!. In *CBR: Comic book resources*. Retrieved from <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=24>  
An official press release from the Marketing Communications Manager of Marvel Comics, this short article explains the change in rating systems for Marvel Comics and gives a brief/simple explanation of the four rating categories.
- Silverman, M. L. (2007, January 22). Public libraries: Censorship and intellectual freedom, a minoritarian view. In *The Scrivener*. Retrieved from [http://the\\_scrivener.blogspot.com/2007/01/public-libraries-censorship-and.html](http://the_scrivener.blogspot.com/2007/01/public-libraries-censorship-and.html)  
This work is an excerpt of Silverman's class essay in Information Professions at the University of Florida College of Information. Within it, Silverman focuses on censorship and what that means for librarians and their communities. He ultimately concludes that librarians distinctly separate the meaning of selection and censorship. One is a process and the other a bias. The work recommends that librarians keep their eye on the goal of representing their community "no matter how marginalized some of its members may be."
- To rate books? An open letter from pat sch[r]oeder. (2006, May 5). In *As if! Authors support intellectual freedom*. Retrieved from <http://asifnews.blogspot.com/2006/05/to-rate-books-open-letter-from-pat.html>  
This article is from a blog featuring opinions and information for young adult authors and librarians. The focus of this post is on the labeling/rating system for children's and young adult books with the main body being a quote of Pat Schroeder's official position on the rating system used by the American Association of Publishers.
- Viz Media. (n.d.). Our ratings. In *Viz Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.viz.com/ratings>  
Viz Media is a manga publisher that prints its suggested rating of individual titles upon its materials. This is the official documentation of their rating system with simple descriptions of what constitutes each rating.
- Watasin, E. (2002). *Charm school : Magical witch girl Bunny*. San Jose, CA: SLG Publishing.  
Scene 8 graphic novel title. Rated T+.
- Wertham, F. (1953). *Seduction of the innocent*. New York, NY: Rinehart & Company, Inc.  
This is a 1954 publication of one man's anti-comic sentiment which encouraged the development of the Comic Code Authority and a heavy censorship of comics in general. This book focuses on how comics lead to delinquency and illiteracy. This work serves as a good comparison for any reservations about including any 'high' rating graphic novels in the library collection.
- Whitta, G., & Naifeh, T. (2005). *Death jr*. Berkeley, CA: Image Comics.  
Scene 6 graphic novel title. Rated T.

Wilson, A. (2009, November 10). Library employees fired over censorship of graphic novel. In *McClatchy*. Retrieved from <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2009/11/10/78655/library-employees-fired-over-censorship.html>

This news article reports a story of two librarians who believed that their library should not hold such graphic material as “The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen” in their collection because children who are too young might get a hold of it. The important part of this article for the author’s study is that it questions what public libraries are there to do, what role do librarians have in monitoring children and whether librarians should get to decide what people read.

Wolk, D. (2007). *Reading comics: How graphic novels work and what they mean* (p. 102). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Within a chapter on why American comics perpetuate the superhero and what that means for the world of comic literature there is a paragraph that mentions how comics have ‘matured’ along with their audience and a rating system was contemplated in the 80s that would mimic the movie industry rating system.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

State #

Interviewer: Brianna Leesch

#### Interview Questions

Gender(my observation)

Do you mind telling me your age? (Age range)

Do you have a master's degree in library/information science? (Talking point)

Would you classify yourself as an Adult, Children's or Teen Librarian?

Have you ever read a comic book/graphic novel/manga before? Did you enjoy it?

Describe your library graphic novel/comic book/manga collection (a few words)

Have there been challenges for certain graphic materials?

If so, was this a factor of misplacement do you think?

How do you perceive your community? (a few words)

What content within the scenes influenced your rating of the materials? (Talk about their process and factors involved.)

Was there anything about the text and pictures that influenced your decision?

Would there be a difference in rating if you looked at this material from a personal point of view versus a professional one?

## **Appendix B: Consent Form**

### **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Consent to Participate in a Research Study Adult Participants**

**Consent Form Version Date:** \_\_\_\_1/23/2013\_\_\_\_

**IRB Study #** 13-1111

**Title of Study:** The Graphic Novel Ratings Game: Publisher Ratings and Librarian Self-rating

**Principal Investigator:** Brianna Leesch

**Principal Investigator Department:** School of Information and Library Science

**Principal Investigator Phone number:** 605-929-1163

**Principal Investigator Email Address:** leesch@email.unc.edu

**Faculty Advisor:** Brian Sturm

**Faculty Advisor Contact Information:** (919) 962-7622 / sturm@ils.unc.edu

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### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this research study is to provide a guideline for librarians to follow when placing graphic material in their library collection. Graphic materials are relatively new to the collection and provide a challenge to placement because of their medium. This study will attempt to find ways to meet this challenge.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are currently working in a public library with a graphic materials collection **OR** you are a current library student at UNC-CH and enrolled in the SILS Master's program.



**How many people will take part in this study?**

There will be approximately 30 people participating in this research study (a mixture of current librarians and UNC SILS Master students).

**How long will your part in this study last?**

Your participation in the interview will last approximately an hour. This includes the entire process of setup, instructions/waiver, the rating of scenes from eight graphic novels, the interview, and closing comments. Once finished there will be no further contact unless you wish to gain access to the finished paper.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

*Overall design:* An exercise and interview.

The exercise will consist of looking at selected scenes from eight graphic novels and rating them according to the rating system provided at the beginning of the exercise.

A short interview about the scenes will follow the exercise. You may choose not to answer a question for any reason.

**What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. There is a small chance you will directly benefit from being in this research study. By participating you may come into new awareness of the graphic material in your library and better be able to identify placement in your library. This study should add to the body of library science.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

The researcher anticipates minimal risk or discomfort during the study. Some of the content being viewed may be mature and there is a minimal risk of embarrassment. There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

**What if we learn about new findings or information during the study?**

You will be given any new information gained during the course of the study that might affect your willingness to continue your participation.

**How will information about you be protected?**

Records will be secured with password protected and anti-virus/spyware software on the primary investigator's private computer.

No one other than the primary investigator will have access to the information.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety.

**What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete?**

You can withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. The investigator also has the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped. After withdrawal any information you have given so far in the study will be destroyed and not part of the research.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**

You will not receive anything for being in this study.

**Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions about the study, complaints, concerns, or if a research-related injury occurs, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu).

**Participant's Agreement:**

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

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Signature of Research Participant

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Date

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Printed Name of Research Participant

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Signature of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

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Date

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Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

### **Appendix C: Peer Recruitment Email**

**Subject Line:** Recruitment for Participation in Graphic Novel Research Study

Hello fellow SILSters,

I am recruiting students to assist me in a research study involving graphic novels and their placement within the library stacks. If you are willing to participate you will be asked to age-rate (assign an approximate age) eight graphic novels based upon selected scenes I will provide. After completing this brief rating exercise, you will be asked a short series of interview questions. This whole process should take about an hour.

This study will take place on-campus at Manning Hall. A meeting time will be determined based on your availability between the preferred dates of **February 12<sup>th</sup> - February 20<sup>th</sup>**. Or at another date that may be agreed upon. I will respond with the meeting place in Manning Hall and a confirmation that I received your consent to participate.

If you are interested, please contact me at [leesch@email.unc.edu](mailto:leesch@email.unc.edu) to set up a date and time.

Thank you very much!

*Brianna Leesch*

Brianna Leesch  
[leesch@email.unc.edu](mailto:leesch@email.unc.edu)  
 School of Information and Library Science  
 University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill  
 IRB Study # 13-1111

Faculty Advisor  
 Brian Sturm, Ph.D  
 Associate Professor at UNC  
 School of Information and Library Science  
 919-962-7622  
[bsturm@email.unc.edu](mailto:bsturm@email.unc.edu)

**Appendix D: Recruitment (Director Edition) Email**

**Subject Line:** Recruitment for Participation in Graphic Novel Research Study

Dear Director (name)

My name is Brianna Leesch and I am writing to you to respectfully request your permission in contacting the librarians under your employ to assist in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's Paper. I am a graduate student in the School of Information and Library Science program at University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. The topic of the study is graphic novels and their placement in the library. The study will examine how librarians age-rate graphic materials (comic books, graphic novels and manga). The information gathering consists of two-parts. The first part asks the librarians to look at short selections from eight graphic novels and use their professional judgment to age-rate the material. The second part includes a brief interview asking about how they arrived at their decisions. The rating exercise and interview will be face-to-face and will take approximately an hour. If given permission and with willing participants, I will travel to your library and the rating/interview will take place there. I will be in your [City-State] between the dates of [Date - Date] and on those dates my meeting times are flexible. Since time is of the essence in this type of academic pursuit, would you kindly reply at your earliest convenience.

If you have a colleague in mind for this study, please feel free to forward the attached letter. This letter requests their assistance and details what they would be expected to do. If, at any point, they wish to withdraw from the process they may do so and the information gathered up to that point will not be used. After the completion of the paper all personal data will be destroyed to protect privacy and uphold confidentiality. Your library will not be linked at all to the paper.

If you do not have a specific person in mind, I would appreciate simply receiving your consent for me to contact your staff.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to meeting with your librarians.

Should you have any questions concerning me or this project, please contact my advisor:

Brian Sturm, Ph.D  
Associate Professor at UNC  
School of Information and Library Science  
919-962-7622  
bsturm@email.unc.edu

Sincerely,

*Brianna Leesch*

Brianna Leesch

[leesch@email.unc.edu](mailto:leesch@email.unc.edu)

School of Information and Library Science

University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill

IRB Study # 13-1111

### **Appendix E: Recruitment (Librarian) Email**

Dear Colleague,

My name is Brianna Leesch and I am writing to request your assistance in a research study I am conducting as part of my Master's paper. My research topic involves graphic novels and placement within the library stacks. If you are willing to participate you will be asked to age-rate (assign an approximate age) eight graphic novels based upon selected scenes I will provide. After completing this brief rating exercise, you will be asked a short series of interview questions. This whole process should take about an hour. You will not be required to leave the library for the interview as I will be coming to you. In order to accommodate your schedule and facilitate the travel necessary for this study, I will make myself available during times chosen by you between the dates of **(DATE - DATE)**.

Total privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. No personal identifying information will appear in the paper, nor will any information on your library. Upon the completion of the paper all personal data gathered will be destroyed. You may, at any point, withdraw from the process and any information gathered will not be used.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this study by emailing me at [leesch@email.unc.edu](mailto:leesch@email.unc.edu) by (DAY, **DATE**, YEAR). If you agree to participate, I will contact you to arrange a time for the rating exercise and interview.

If you wish to verify this request, please feel free to contact my academic advisor:  
 Brian Sturm, Ph.D  
 Associate Professor at UNC  
 School of Information and Library Science  
 919-962-7622  
[bsturm@email.unc.edu](mailto:bsturm@email.unc.edu)

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate. I hope we have the opportunity to visit.

Sincerely,

*Brianna Leesch*

Brianna Leesch  
[leesch@email.unc.edu](mailto:leesch@email.unc.edu)  
 School of Information and Library Science  
 University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill  
 IRB Study # 13-1111

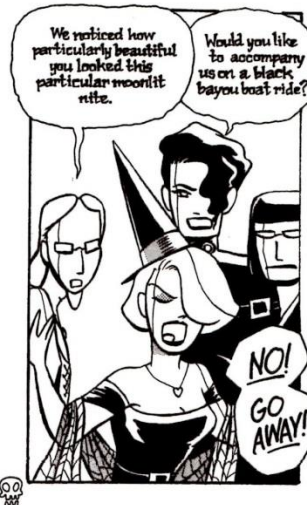
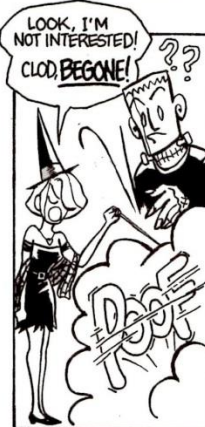
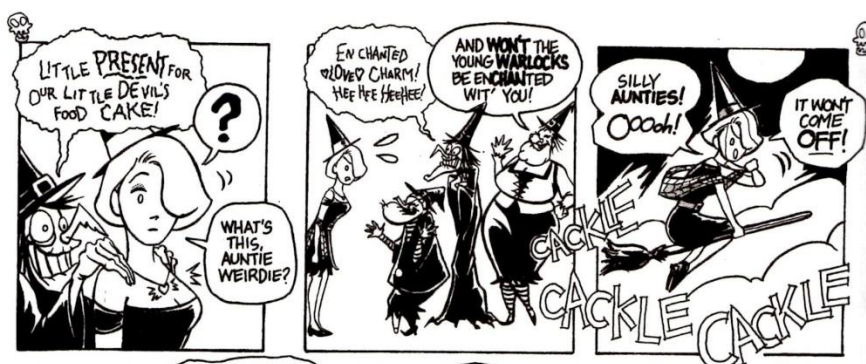
## Appendix F: Scene 8 - Charm School

Copied with permission from Elizabeth Watasin (Author).







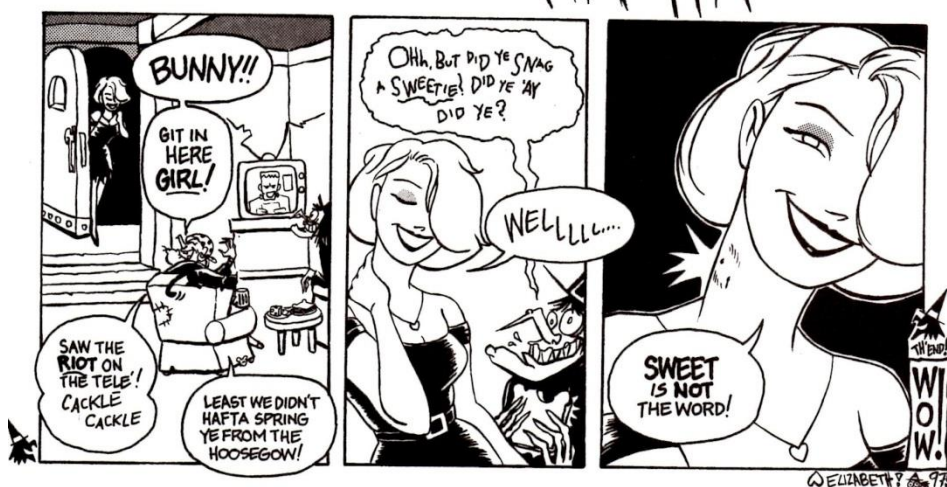
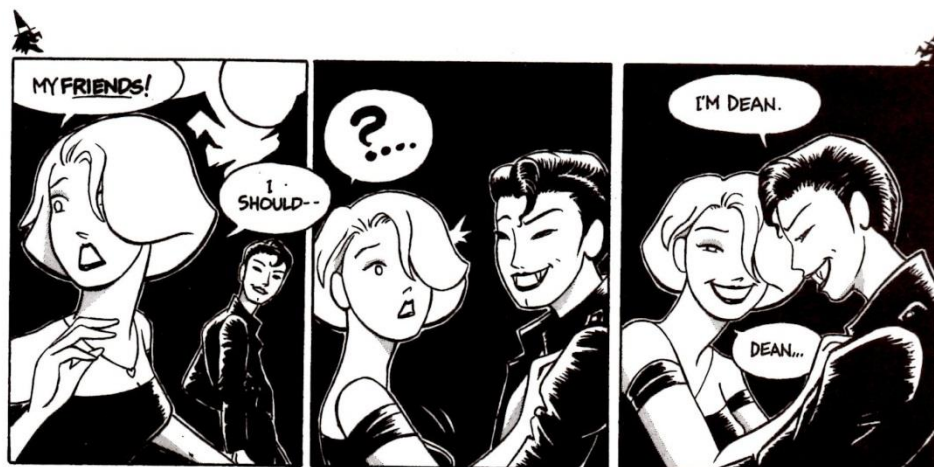






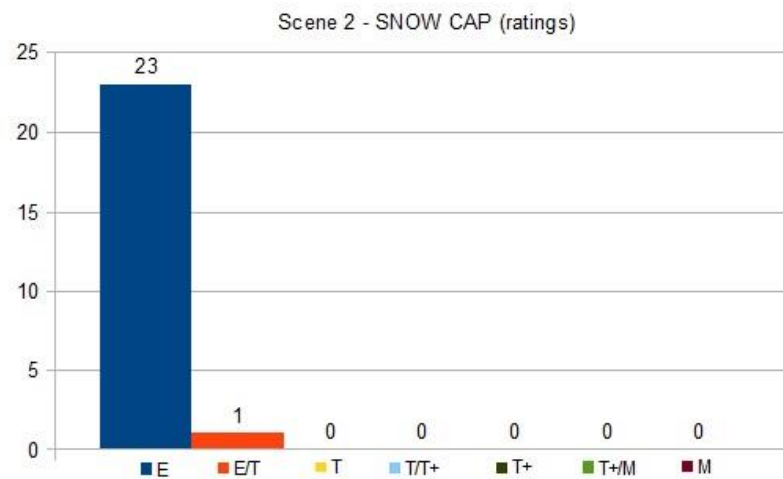
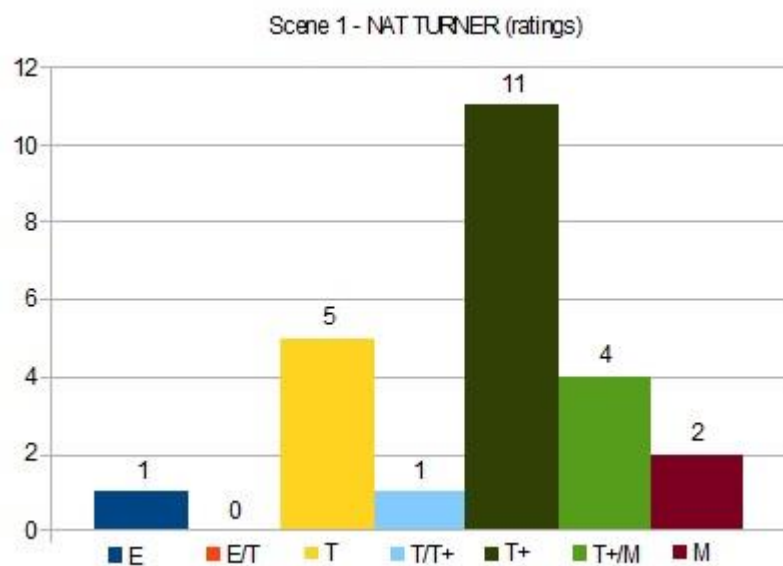


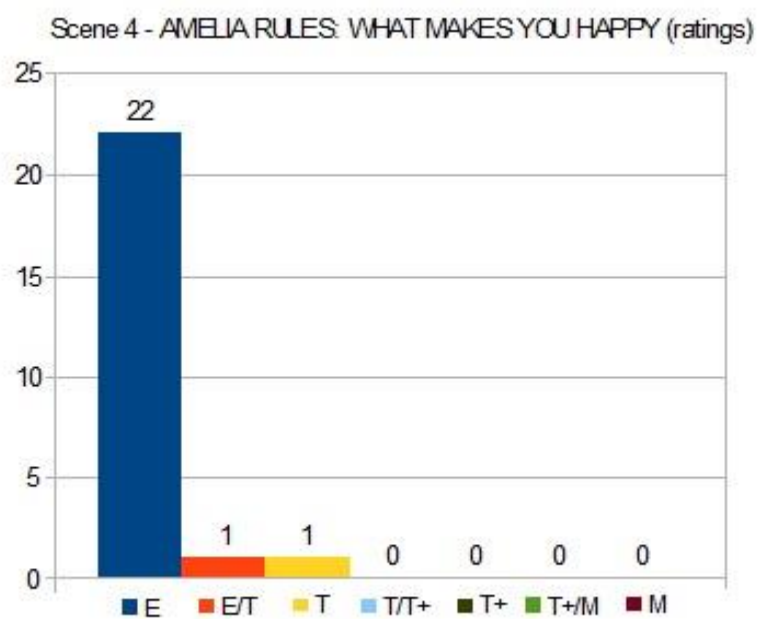
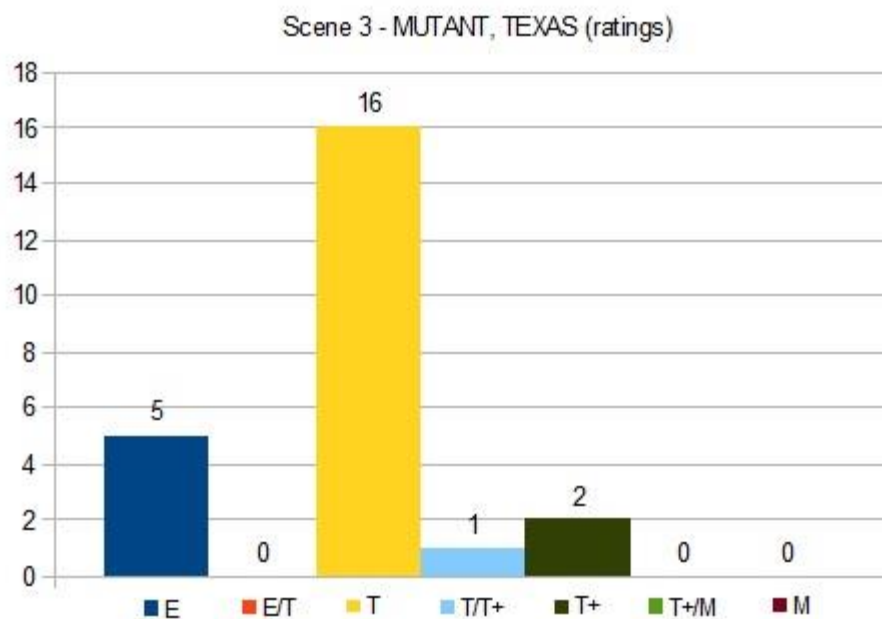


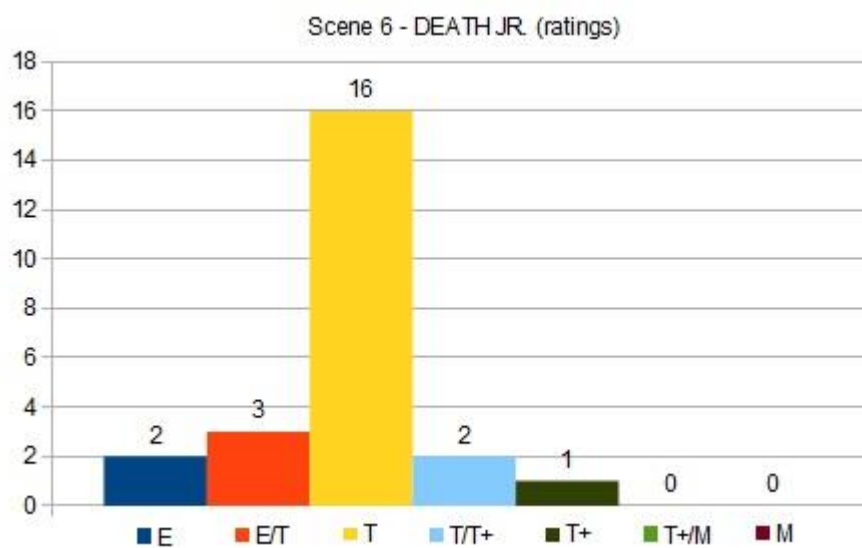
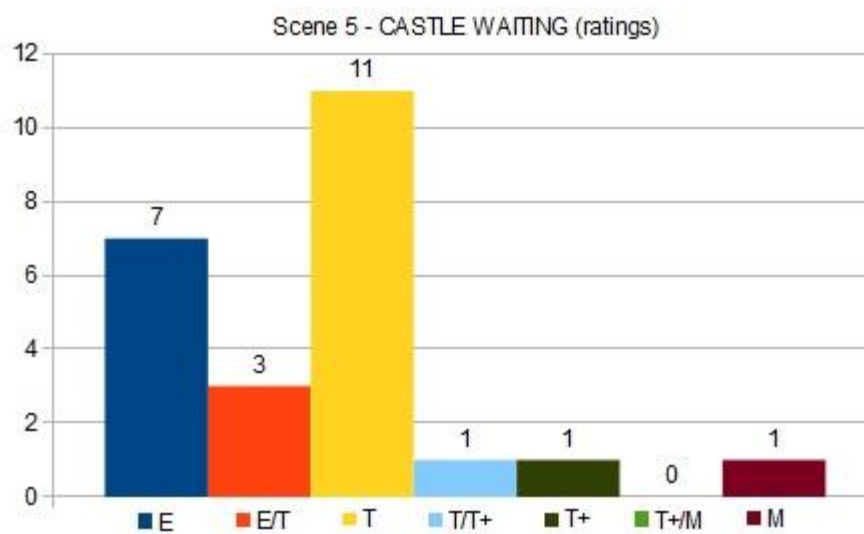


**Appendix G: Graph Representations of Participant Ratings per Scene**

The total number of participants was 24.

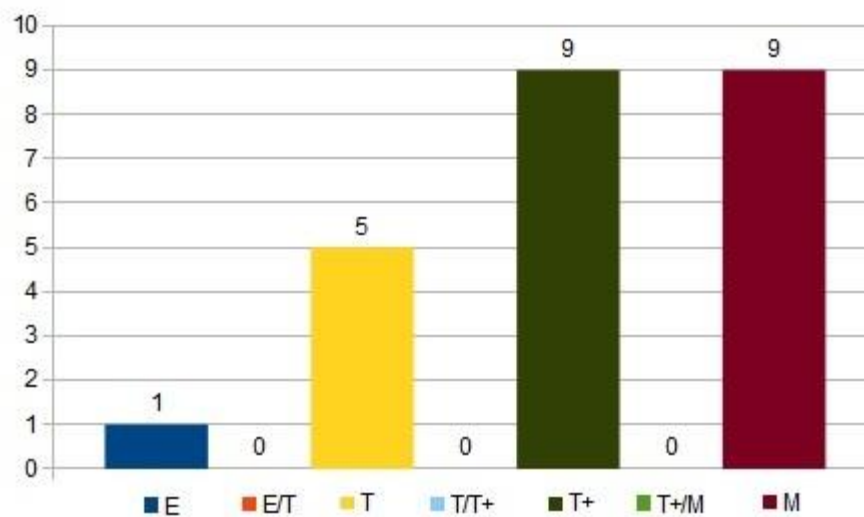




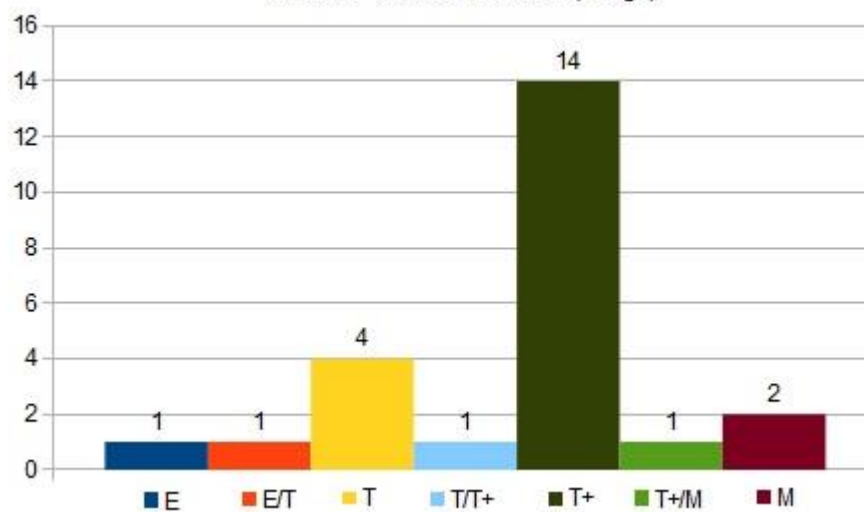




Scene 7 - THE GOON: ROUGH STUFF (ratings)



Scene 8 - CHARM SCHOOL (ratings)

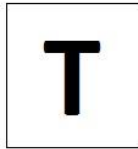


**Appendix H: Rating System for Exercise**

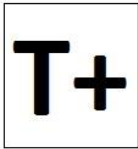
Adapted from DC Comics rating system



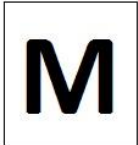
- Appropriate for readers of all ages.



- Appropriate for readers age 12 and older.



- Appropriate for readers age 16 and older.



- Appropriate for readers age 18 and older.